

INTRODUCTION TO *THE LORD'S PRAYER*

Long ago, when Christians were first learning about the faith, people would prepare for baptism as adults over two or three years. The final part of their journey would be in the season of Lent, preparing for baptism at Easter.

During the final part of the journey, the bishop would teach them about some of the greatest treasures of the Christian faith. One of the most important was the prayer we know as the Lord's Prayer.

This prayer was only taught to and said by Christians. You couldn't look it up in a book (there were no printed books then). It was one of the special things you were given as you prepared for your baptism. You would learn it by heart and teach it to your household.

Reflect for a moment on the wonder of this special prayer, used by every generation of Christians there has ever been. For some, the words are very familiar. Perhaps we learned them as children, but perhaps we have never thought about what they mean for adults. For some, the words are too familiar—we have given up thinking about what they mean. But for some, the words will be new, something precious to be explored on the way to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

One of the early Church Fathers said that the whole of the Christian gospel—the whole of the good news—is in the Lord's Prayer if we truly understand it.

We are going to explore the Lord's Prayer in these sessions as a gateway to the Christian gospel, as a guide to our own prayers, and as a way of deepening our relationship with God.

This prayer is used all around the world by millions of people worldwide and has been for 2,000 years. There probably isn't a moment, day or night, when there isn't someone on earth praying the Lord's Prayer.

There probably isn't a language on earth that doesn't contain a version of the Lord's Prayer.

You can pray this prayer when you are full of joy. You can pray it in the ordinary days. It's used at services of baptism and weddings as we celebrate great family events. It's used at the bedside of someone who is dying and at their funeral service.

The Lord's Prayer is found in a slightly different form in two of the four Gospels (the accounts of Jesus' life and teaching) we find in the Bible: the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. In both Gospels, the words of the prayer are given by Jesus. The setting for the prayer gives us an idea of why Jesus gives us this prayer as a precious resource for our faith.

Luke puts the Lord's Prayer in Chapter 11 of his Gospel in the context of Jesus' own prayers. The disciples see the difference that prayer makes to the Lord. But they also know that they struggle with their own prayers. They don't know what to say or do. So the disciples ask Jesus a key question as he returns from his prayers one morning: *Lord, teach us to pray.*

Think about this request for a moment. It's a request that implies that prayer is a very important activity. But it's a request which implies that prayer is something we need to learn to do.

Jesus replies by giving them a prayer to pray. It is a very brief prayer and one that anyone can memorize from an early age. Yet each line in the prayer is rich and powerful. This is the prayer that teaches us to pray.

Matthew sets the prayer in the center of the collection of Jesus' teachings and sayings known as the Sermon on the Mount. Again, it follows some basic teaching on how to pray. Prayer is not about showing off and standing on street corners but about developing a secret, inner relationship with God. It's not about the ability to string words together and impress other people but about simplicity and sincerity.

Then Jesus offers these words for prayer which give us a way of keeping to his teachings. The Lord's Prayer is brief compared to other prayers of the day. The Lord's Prayer is something anyone can learn by heart and so use in private, in that hidden room, as we come to our prayers: *Pray then in this way.*

God is approachable. Prayer is something anyone can do. You don't have to use complicated words or flowery language. God isn't swayed by arguments or by length or by skill in prayer.

Here are some words you can say, but here also is a deep pattern for prayer.

Here is a way of seeing God, the world, and yourself that is profound, revolutionary, and good news.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE VERSION

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE VERSION